



Policy and people

Middle East Cancer Consortium fights against cancer and disunity

The US National Cancer Institute (NCI) is a founding sponsor of the Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC). Looking back at the first year of MECC, NCI director Richard Klausner says: "Despite all of the challenges, the Middle East Cancer Consortium is clearly on track with all of its projects and goals, the result of the hard work and incredible commitment of the project leaders in the region. Despite the tensions, MECC has continued to be clearly supported by all of the participating governments."

The second MECC small grants competition starts on Nov 16, 1998. "MECC aims to support quality cancer research and encourage collaboration of scientists and clinicians from different member states: Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian National Authority", says Michael Silbermann, MECC executive director. Of 39 proposals submitted during the first round of competition, 44% were successful, accruing US\$365 000 after review at the NCI, says Joe Harford associate director for Special Projects, NCI. MECC principal investigators are eligible for up to \$15 000 per year for 2 years.

The Small Grants Programme runs in parallel with the Consortium's primary goal--its Joint Cancer Registration Project. This project focuses on coordinating data collection by the local registries and coding cases to a standardised system. Training on registration is a high priority for registry staff and medical personnel in the region. One serious limitation of the Project is that cancer is currently a notifiable disease only in Israel. Efforts to bring in legislation to enforce reporting of cancer to the authorities are being made elsewhere. NCI has pledged \$500 000 per year for 5 years for MECC activities. USAID recently added its support with a promise of \$1 050 000 over the next 5 years. Other income includes: \$100 000 from Novartis, Switzerland; \$20 000 from Cyprus; and \$100 000 from Israel.

The anticipation is that the governments will "gradually take full responsibility" for running the registries so Ministers of Health are involved in all decision making, including local selection of research proposals, funding distribution, and overall running via the Ministerial Steering Committee.

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